

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MILITARY VOTING PROTECTION ACT

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, as the Senate knows, yesterday we voted to pass the Defense authorization bill. However, one of the casualties of yesterday's process—which was unique, to my knowledge; we actually had only two rollcall votes on amendments to the Defense authorization bill, which I don't think has ever happened before, and many important amendments were blocked by the process, amendments that might have been included in the managers' package. I wish to mention just one of those, which is the Military Voting Protection Act.

This was originally offered as a free-standing bill earlier, but then it changed to become an amendment to the Defense authorization bill because we thought it was particularly appropriate, as we were dealing with the needs of the men and women in uniform around the world, that we also respect and enforce their right to cast a vote.

We know from 2006 statistics alone that of all of the eligible civilian and military voters around the world who were eligible and who actually requested an absentee by mail ballot, only 5.5 percent of those votes were actually counted. That is a disgraceful statistic and one we need to do something about.

I compliment Senator LEVIN, Senator FEINSTEIN, and others for working with us during the process of the Defense authorization bill to come together on what I believe was a clear and acceptable amendment to all sides, but because of the bizarre process we found ourselves in yesterday, this bill was basically a casualty of that process, as I say.

So what I am hoping to do is take a bill we worked on that is very important in order to protect one of the most important civil rights of our men and women in uniform—the right to vote—and hopefully, by unanimous consent today, we can pass this bill and get it on its way to the President for signature in due course. I don't see any reason, since we did work together on this on a bipartisan basis and it has been cleared by both sides, there would be any objection.

UNANIMOUS-CONSENT REQUEST— S. 3073

Mr. CORNYN. So let me ask unanimous consent at this time that the Rules Committee be discharged and the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. 3073, the Military Voting Act.

I ask unanimous consent that the amendment at the desk be agreed to—by the way, that is the amendment we worked on with Senator BENNETT, the ranking member, and Senator FEIN-

STEIN, the chairman of the Rules Committee, together with Senator LEVIN and Senator WARNER. I ask unanimous consent that the bill, as amended, be read a third time and passed, the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, and that any statements relating to the bill be printed at this point in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I object on behalf of the leadership, as the Rules Committee needs time to look at this and digest this and figure this out to try to work something out. So I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I am disappointed that the other side would object. This is the same amendment that was already cleared by the Rules Committee, so I don't understand what the process is that the Senator is referring to. I hope this isn't just another delay tactic. It is something that really cries out for us to address.

I have to say, when I travel back to my State and talk to my constituents, they absolutely believe this Congress is dysfunctional. If we can't find some way to come together on a bipartisan basis to pass noncontroversial voting rights protection for our military such as this, I guess there is not a lot of hope for doing other, perhaps more complicated, more involved things.

This is very straightforward. To have an objection to this bill which has already been worked on and cleared through the process and which was a casualty of the bizarre process by which we adopted the Defense authorization bill, without any right, really, to offer any amendments such as this, is, frankly, beyond me.

In the remaining few days this Congress is in session, I hope whatever concerns the Senator was referring to which have not been made known to me will be addressed. I will come back here every day, if necessary, and offer a similar unanimous consent request. I would ask those on the other side who object to the passage of this bill to offer me some explanation for what the specific concern is. If there is a problem we can eliminate by working with them, we would be glad to do it. But to just stonewall this important amendment to protect one of the most basic civil rights for our men and women in uniform—the right to vote—is, frankly, beyond me.

Mr. President, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WEBB). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ENERGY

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, I want to take a few minutes to express my strong support for the so-called extenders package, which includes the Energy Improvement and Extension Act and will come before the Senate, as I understand it, as early as this afternoon.

Passage of this bill is very important for the country and will have wide-reaching impacts. It will reduce U.S. dependence on foreign oil, curb greenhouse gas emissions, create hundreds of thousands of American jobs, promote R&D in our innovative industries, ease fiscal burdens on rural counties, and reduce the tax burden on middle-class families.

The bill demonstrates the critical role that tax incentives can play in addressing our country's most pressing challenges.

Let me focus today on the very robust package of tax incentives for clean, renewable energy, and energy efficiency. Those are incentives I and many of my colleagues have worked on since the beginning of this Congress. We have already taken eight votes this Congress on various versions of this energy tax package. Unfortunately, as the "green" energy sector has sat by and production has slowed in that sector, and as skyrocketing gas prices have made our dependence on foreign oil more apparent than ever, our energy tax incentives have been hostage to a broader dispute between the parties concerning whether, and how, to offset the costs of extending various tax provisions. I am very pleased that after a number of false starts, we appear, finally, to have reached a compromise.

The compromise will enable us to become a more energy-efficient nation. It will wean us off of our dependence on fossil fuels. It extends the production tax credit by 1 year for wind energy and by 2 years for other qualified renewable sources. I had hoped we could achieve a longer term extension of the production tax credit, but this is all that could be afforded within the package's cost constraints. Undoubtedly, this bill's extension of the production tax credit will enable our renewable industries to stay afloat. Today, I want to state my commitment again to work for a long-term extension of the production tax credit, which is very much needed, which I hope we can achieve in the next Congress.

This package, however, includes long-term extensions for tax credits that make distributed green energy technologies affordable for American businesses and families. The investment tax credit, which gives businesses a 30-percent tax credit for investing in solar, wind, geothermal, and ocean energy equipment, is extended for a full 8 years. So, too, is the residential energy efficiency property credit, which gives families a 30-percent tax credit for the cost of installing solar equipment at

their residences. That is an 8-year extension of that provision, which is very good news for many Americans.

For both of these tax incentives, the bill expands the classes of qualifying equipment. This means businesses and families will have added flexibility in choosing the energy-saving technologies that make the most sense for them. Both credits are expanded to include small wind technologies that are used for onsite energy production, and geothermal heat pumps, which can use the Earth as either a heat source, when operating in heating mode, or a heat sink, when operating in cooling mode. There are already more than 1 million geothermal heat pumps installed in the United States, and those who have installed them can save up to 70 percent annually on their utility bills. So when this bill becomes law, families will be able to choose among installing solar technology, small wind technology, and geothermal heat pumps in their homes, and the 30 percent tax credit will be available for any of those installations. In case of solar electric investments, we greatly improve the incentive by removing the current \$2,000 credit cap.

The bill also expands the business credit to include combined heat and power systems, which use a heat engine or power station to simultaneously generate both electricity and useful heat. Businesses that install these systems are able to get both heat and electricity from the same source, which decreases both energy costs and greenhouse gas emissions.

The benefits of these investments, these incentives, go far beyond energy independence, greenhouse gas reduction, and energy cost savings. They will enable U.S. firms of all sizes to add a great many "green" jobs on American soil. The Navigant Consulting organization recently put out a report estimating that the 8-year extension of the solar credit that I have just talked about will create 1.2 million employment opportunities in this country, including 440,000 permanent jobs, and \$232 billion in domestic investment. Solar energy is already an important economic engine in my State of New Mexico. I am very pleased this extension is anticipated to add an additional 12,000 direct jobs in my State and 7,000 indirect jobs.

Shifting to the need to reduce demand for petroleum, the bill creates a new plug-in electric drive vehicle credit. We are hopeful that plug-in electric vehicles will come to the market next year and that the Government will help individuals purchase these vehicles through tax credits. This bill provides those tax credits will start at \$2,500, and they will climb as high as \$7,500, depending upon the battery capacity of the particular vehicle.

For commercial vehicles, the bill adds incentives for idling reduction units, which provides an alternative source of power used to heat, cool, or provide electricity to the cab or other

parts of the truck. There are more than 200,000 trucks carrying refrigerated cargo around this country any day. The fleet owners will be incentivized to install advanced insulation on those trucks that can dramatically reduce the amount of gasoline those trucks consume trying to keep that cargo cool. So this is a very important provision.

Finally, the bill addresses our conservation and efficiency needs. It extends credits for energy-efficient improvements to new and existing homes and commercial buildings. Because energy used to heat and cool residential and commercial buildings accounts for nearly 40 percent of U.S. energy consumption—and nearly as much of our carbon dioxide emissions—these tax incentives are especially important. Owners of existing homes will be able to claim a tax credit of up to 10 percent of the combined costs from all qualified electric efficiency improvements, such as installing insulation in their homes, replacing windows, water heaters, and high-efficiency cooling and heating equipment. For new homes, there is a \$2,000 tax credit for a home builder who constructs a qualified new energy-efficient home, certified to achieve a 50-percent reduction in energy usage. With new homes likely to remain part of our Nation's housing stock for more than 60 years, we need to make sure that builders have the right incentives to make energy efficiency a top priority. Owners of commercial buildings will continue to be able to deduct up to \$1.80 per square foot of building floor area if they achieve a 50-percent energy savings target through energy reductions for the building's HVAC and interior lighting system.

With this addition to the provisions related to energy, American businesses are counting on Congress to enact this package because it contains an extension of the R&D development tax credit. It contains important tax relief for American families. It patches the alternative minimum tax to prevent it from engulfing millions of additional hard-working families. It lowers the income threshold for the \$1,000 child tax credit from \$12,000 to \$8,500. That change alone enables 25,000 New Mexico children to newly qualify and an additional 94,000 to receive a larger credit than under prior law.

It extends the qualified tuition deduction for higher education expenses. That is a deduction of up to \$4,000 that helps more than 4.4 million middle-class families meet the cost of sending their children to college.

Finally, the bill includes the secure world schools provisions and the payment in lieu of taxes provisions. These are extremely important for Western States in particular but for virtually all of our States.

As to the payment in lieu of taxes, let me talk specifically about that issue. We increase funding for payment in lieu of taxes in the current fiscal

year. We fully fund the program for 4 years. These Federal payments are essential to local governments, including many in my State, in order to offset the losses and property taxes due to nontaxable Federal lands located within their boundaries. This funding is long overdue, and it is more desperately needed now than ever before.

Passage of this legislation, this energy incentives package, will demonstrate to the American people that we are willing to shift our tax priorities in a new direction toward a national energy policy that promotes diversified domestic sources of clean energy.

It furthers the significant progress we made in recent years with respect to promoting investment in efficiency and the renewable energy technologies that can help grow our economy. And beyond energy issues, it addresses key concerns of American families, businesses, and municipalities.

I applaud the various Senators who have had a major part in the development of this legislation, particularly Senator BAUCUS and Senator GRASSLEY, but also our leadership, both the Democratic and Republican leaders, for bringing us together around this package.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. Mr. President I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

UNANIMOUS-CONSENT REQUEST— H.R. 6049

Mr. REID. Mr. President, as we speak, the financial turmoil of this country is ongoing. One way we can help is create some jobs, and that is what this legislation regarding the tax extenders would do.

We have waited for months for this legislation—months. It seems to me we should move forward. I am so disappointed that it has taken so long to get where we are. It has been months.

Senators have worked for a long period of time. We had a problem early on about how we were going to pay for it. I admire and respect the work done by Senators CANTWELL and ENSIGN. They have worked very hard. It was a bipartisan effort to move forward. We have Senators BAUCUS and GRASSLEY who have worked very hard, joining with Senators CANTWELL and ENSIGN to move this legislation forward. We have a program to do this.

The longer we wait, the more difficult it is. We are in the waning hours of this legislative session, and there is going to be a lot of hue and cry that we not go home now. There is all this financial turmoil.